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Executive Registry

8 October 1974

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Noted by DCI
10/16/74

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Interview by Ambassador Taylor Belcher
of the Murphy Commission

I met with Ambassador Taylor Belcher of the Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy--the so-called Murphy Commission--for two hours in my office on 7 October 1974. Ambassador Belcher is given to reminiscing and citing personal experiences to illustrate his point of view, so we didn't cover as much ground as the duration of the interview might indicate.

Ambassador Belcher had met with CIA officials in his pursuit of material for his study on "Clandestine Operations and Covert Action," and they evidently gave him my name as a resource person.

Before we started talking I declared that I was disturbed by the Commission's intent to publish its report as an unclassified document with a possible classified annex and would respond accordingly. I noted that until the last few weeks I considered even the name of the 40 Committee to be classified.

Ambassador Belcher said he was troubled by the same point, that he had recently signed a new secrecy agreement, and that he found it difficult to separate what he knew about covert operations from personal experience and what he had gained from reading the overt press. He declared that it was his intent to try to avoid classified material, not to review classified documents if he could get sufficient material without them, and to produce a report which would reflect his personal views and opinions but be sourced to others. He visualized his report as stressing methods and mechanisms of proposing, reviewing and approving clandestine operations rather than substance. Our talk centered on my responses to questions and proposals regarding changes in the mechanics of approving and reviewing clandestine operations.

The major point I made during our talk was that I saw no need to change the machinery--that it provided opportunities for review and dissent if participants exercised them. In short, the key to effective

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review was a matter of personalities rather than machinery, and changing the machinery would not materially affect the outcome.

His questions and comments prompted this impression of his views:

- Clandestine operations and covert action are necessary and are here to stay. It is simply not reasonable to entertain suggestions that they be abolished.
- Suggestions that Congressional representation be added to the 40 Committee were not practical--they raise security and Constitutional questions, as well as fail to ensure any improvement of the review process.
- There seemed to be little support for the idea that if the Executive Secretary of the 40 Committee were provided with a larger staff it would improve things.
- The DCI asked for teeth to enforce security, and it would be a good idea if he got them and used them to "bite" an offending individual or two who is responsible for leaking classified information.
- The Ambassador, his DCM and the Assistant and Deputy Assistant Secretaries of State ought to be aware of a covert operation in their geographic area; probably the country desk chief should, too. He thought this could prevent "silly" actions--even those that might be directed by the President and not resisted by those immediately around him--which the Ambassador and the DCM (who might be the highest career officer at a post served by a political ambassador) would recognize as infeasible or counterproductive.
- All of the accomplishments of covert action would not offset the damage done by the recent publicity and exposure of the Chile affair. (He agreed that he'd never seen a list of accomplishments, only the failures or exposures; but upon reflection agreed that Iran and Guatemala he considered positive achievements and he knew of other smaller ones from his own personal experience.)
- He thought that 90% of covert action proposals came from the field; "Which comes first, the chicken (policy) or the egg (action)?"

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- Congressional review has not been very effective or pursued with much vigor.
- His impression (having attended Special Group/Counterinsurgency meetings, which he mistakingly thought was the 40 Committee's immediate predecessor, the 303 Committee) was that CIA sometimes sold a proposal by glib talking, avoiding some of the most sensitive or controversial issues. Now that fewer meetings are held there is even less opportunity for questioning. He allowed that the fact that each participating agency had a written presentation which it could review, ask the originator for interpretations, clarifications and amplifications, and consider sans any "glib talk" could be an improvement over a hurried verbal commentary at a meeting.

Ambassador Belcher was friendly, personable and appeared to be favorably disposed to CIA and the continuation of covert operations.



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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

8 Oct. 1974

DCT
Ben,

The Director may be interested in the attached.

I am enclosing copies addressed to [redacted] on the IC Staff who, I understand from [redacted] is monitoring all of this, and a copy for [redacted] who, I understand, is monitoring this for the DDO (and who, I guess, gave Belcher my name).

I am also informing my colleagues on the NSC.

That is all.

Mary
Thatcher
[redacted] 10/16/74
(advised)